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## **NATIONAL SECURITY OF BANGLADESH : CHALLENGES AND OPTIONS**

Security is amongst the prime concerns of nation states. But security maintenance, in view of rapid changes in the politico-economic and strategic fields at the national, regional and global levels, becomes a difficult task. Even states with high national capabilities, well-conceived and well-formulated security doctrine, and identified threats and foes may find it quite difficult to respond to new changes in a consistent manner. The problem is more complicated for states which have the least national capabilities, no security doctrine - conceived or formulated, no identified threats and enemies or have the misidentified sources of threats. And whatever capabilities this category of states have, fall far short of their effective defence against threats - internal and external. Bangladesh represents a typical example in this respect.

Of the multiple crucial issues inextricably related to the existence of Bangladesh the issue of national security has been neglected most. Being an underdeveloped and econo-militarily weak Third World state Bangladesh has been perhaps most indifferent to her national security question. Until the present time the country lacks a domestic consensus as to what constitutes its security and what are the sources of its insecurity. The ruling elites in Dhaka, in most cases, have equated the country's security with its immunity from external attack or aggression. This was naturally followed by too much emphasis on the military defence.

Despite it the country's military power remains too insignificant to withstand foreign aggression emanating from any quarters. On the other hand, the economy remains very poor with a sluggish growth rate over the past years. Moreover, repeated phase of autocracy and the consequential mismanagement, corruption and malpractices have put the survival of the economy at stake. Endless poverty, malnutrition, increasing unemployment and underemployment, rising external debt and dependence are the recurrent issues that today threaten the security of Bangladesh most. In addition, natural calamities like floods and tornadoes that cause damages and devastations of high magnitude shake up the very foundation of the economy almost on a regular basis making its survival almost totally dependent on foreign assistance. Then what does security mean for Bangladesh ? Is the Western style externally-oriented security strategy applicable to her security needs ? What are the sources of her insecurity and how menacing they are ? To what extent do the prevailing sources of threats undermine her security ? What strategies, both in internal and external contexts, should Bangladesh follow to preserve and strengthen her national security ?

The present paper is an attempt to delve into an analysis of these questions and related issues. The study mainly concentrates on the following areas : (a) national security in the context of Bangladesh, (b) geopolitical environment of Bangladesh viewed from security perspectives, (c) sources of threats to the security of Bangladesh, and (d) strategies Bangladesh has so far followed to strengthen her security. Finally, the paper puts up some suggestions that may be effective to strengthen the national security of Bangladesh.

## I. BANGLADESH AND THE CONCEPT OF NATIONAL SECURITY

The concept of national security, although as old as nation state itself, came to be widely used and discussed in international

relations following World War II. It is generally viewed in terms of power, avoiding war or is equated with survival, and for some it is the relative freedom from harmful threats.<sup>1</sup> It is used to justify the maintenance of armies, the development of new weapons systems, and the manufacture of armaments. In the literature on International Relations the concept has been, therefore, used more in militaristic sense. The widely used and accepted definition of the concept is purely a military one : security is the immunity of a state or nation to threats emanating from outside its boundaries.

The military approach to national security is based on the assumption that the principal threat to security comes from other nations. The Western literature on national security is basically dominated by this assumption. Walter Lippmann, who first defined national security in explicit terms, said, "a nation is secure to the extent to which it is not in danger of having to sacrifice core values, if it wishes to avoid war, and is able, if challenged, to maintain them by such victory in such a war".<sup>2</sup> According to Arnold Wolfers, Lippmann's definition "implies that security rises and falls with the ability of a nation to deter an attack or to defeat it" and he maintains that security "after all is nothing but the absence of the evil of insecurity, a negative value, so to speak".<sup>3</sup> Among the present generation of American authors, Frank N. Trager and Frank L. Samonie have delineated it from a policy perspective. According to them, it is that part of government policy having as its objective the creation of national and international conditions favourable to the protection or extension

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1. See Javeed Ahmed Sheikh, "Security Perceptions of Weak Nations : A Case Study of Pakistan" in Syed Farooq Hasnat and Anton Pelinka (eds.), *Security For the Weak Nations : A Multiple Perspective* (Izharsons, Lahore, 1986), p. 83.
  2. Walter Lippmann, *US Foreign Policy : Shield of the Republic* (Boston, Little Brown 1943) p. 51.
  3. Arnold Wolfers, *Discord and Collaboration*, (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press 1962) p. 150.

of vital national values against existing and potential adversaries.<sup>4</sup> Talukder Maniruzzaman, a prominent Third World scholar, has taken a similar approach on security. In the context of small Third World states he defines security as the protection and preservation of the minimum core values of any nation : political independence and territorial integrity".<sup>5</sup>

The post-war western literature on national security reflects the prevailing realities in the Western World - the post war intense cold war between the US and the USSR, the cold War dominated strategic environment and the building of rival defence blocs. Consequently, the concept acquired three major characteristics, namely, its external orientation, its strong linkage with systemic security and its binding ties with the security of the two major alliance blocs.<sup>6</sup> As a result, perception of security and insecurity in the West has always revolved round the external factor, and the various dimensions attached to it.

The security concept prevailing in the Western world, however, ignores its internal dimensions as no Western country has ever faced any severe threat from its domestic front. How this could be possible ? The particular process of historical and political development that the Western countries had undergone over the past few centuries has made it possible. The process dates back at least to the Peace of Westphalia (1648), if not an earlier period. The interactions between the different domestic political forces and between the states themselves led to the development of a 'unique system of states' in which legitimation both of the system and of the individual participants therein was achieved. These two

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4. See Javeed Ahmed Sheikh, *op. cit.*, p. 83.

5. Talukder Maniruzzaman, *The Security of Small States in the Third World*, Canberra Papers on Strategy and Defence, No. 25 (Canberra, Strategic and Defence Studies Centre, Australian National University, 1982), p. 15.

6. Mohammad Ayoob, "Security in the Third World; The Worm about to Turn ?" in *International Affairs* (London), Vol. 60, No. 1, Winter 1983/84, p. 43.

factors i.e., the legitimation of the system and of the individual's position in it, eventually contributed to the development of a firm foundation of intellectual traditions in which, at least in terms of political analysis, the security of individuals and of groups came to be totally subsumed within the category of state security.<sup>7</sup> This provides the reasons as to why external rather than internal security issues have dominated security debates in the Western World.

The Third World countries, most of which achieved independent statehood after the Second World War, came to perceive security in Western perspectives and like many colonial legacies they inherited this concept too. Perhaps the post-war world order and the deliberate transfer of many thorny unresolved inter-state problems by the colonial powers in the wake of the process of decolonisation are among the factors that helped penetrate the Western military dominated security concept into the Third World. Based on external oriented perception of security almost all Third World countries are now seen bent on developing and modernizing their war machines. Like their counterparts in the developed West the Third World countries are also frequently found avoiding and ignoring the domestic dimensions of security, although in most cases, their very survival is threatened by threats emanating from the domestic fronts. A perceptive Third World scholar on security, Mohammad Ayoob, observes "despite the rhetoric of many Third World leaders, the sense of insecurity from which these states - and more particularly their regimes - suffer emanates to a substantial extent from within their boundaries rather than from outside".<sup>8</sup> Although he does not rule out the existence of external threats, he, however, maintains that "the mix of internal and external sources of threats to these state structures, and particularly to their regimes, is quite often heavily weighted in

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7. *Ibid.*, p. 42.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 43.

favour of internal sources."<sup>9</sup> The Third World countries may be able to defend themselves in greater or lesser degrees from external threats but almost all of them remain vulnerable to internal threats. External threats, in most cases, only help augment the problems of insecurity that exist within state boundaries.

The applicability of the military hardware-based security concept is, therefore, irrational and illogical to the Third World countries. It has come under vehement attack from different quarters.<sup>10</sup> The stupendous problems these countries face today are purely politico-economic and social in character and they constitute legitimate security concerns. The economic insecurities manifest in draconian poverty, rising unemployment, massive external debt, endemic sense of economic deprivation among the various competing groups are perpetuating this vulnerability of these states. The political and social problems specific to them are no less insignificant than the economic ones. Such state of frustrating scenarios in the Third World countries contributes to an increasing realization that security concerns in the developed and developing nations are not identical but entirely different. As a result, since the early 1970s national security began to be redefined in the context of the Third World countries. It was realized that the abstract values of sovereignty and territorial integrity can not have enduring appeal for hungry masses and it is poverty, not the lack of military hardware that is responsible for insecurity across the southern half of the planet.<sup>11</sup> Robert McNamara, the former World Bank president, taking into consideration the almost invincible issues of poverty and unemployment, defined security from this perspective :

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9. *Ibid.*

10. See for example, Michael Renner, *National Security: The Economic and Environmental Dimensions*. World Watch Paper 89.

11. Robert McNamara, *The Essence of Security* (New York, Harper and Row, 1968), p. 149.

"Security means development. Security is not military hardware, though it may include it, security is not military force, though it may involve it, security is not traditional military activity, though it may encompass it. Security is development, and without development there can be no security".<sup>12</sup>

The new emphasis on security through development highlights the actual security needs in the developing countries. Development is deemed to work as the catalyst for change in these societies. In this respect, the question of political and social security are to be given due cognizance. Alongwith the pace of economic development appropriate measures are necessary to promote social values and political institutionalism. Such measures are specifically necessary in view of the fact that many Third World countries that introduced democratic political order aimed at promoting social, political and economic institutions after independence, have faced collapse of the same. This is also important because our past experience reveals that high percapita income is no guarantee that access to resources and opportunities are equal or equitable for all citizens under land and thus economic growth in narrow sense of the term has neither ushered in democratic political order nor made it secure.<sup>13</sup> Due to social polarization, differentiation and discrimination, political democracy in institutional format fail to ensure social and economic democracy in the Third World.

In recent times, the concept of security has been expanded to include threats arising out of environmental crisis throughout the world. Environmental nightmares like deforestation, soil erosion, acidification, desertification, global warming induced by 'green

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12. *Ibid.*

13. See Muzaffer Ahmad, "Economic Development, Political Modernization and Internal Security : A Review of Certain Conceptual Issues" in M. Abdul Hafiz and Mizanur Rahman Khan (eds.) *Development, Politics and Security: The Third World Context* (Dhaka, BIISS, 1990) pp. 15-21.

house effect', depletion of the ozone layer, etc., have already challenged the prospects of the survival of human civilization. Now it seems that threats to security may arise less from the relationship of nation to nation and more from the relationship of man to nature.<sup>14</sup> The security ramifications of environmental factors first received international cognizance at the 38th Pugwash conference on Science and World Affairs in Dagomy, USSR in September 1988. The conference made a clarion call on all scientists of the World to expand their concerns to the environmental dangers. The World Commission on Environment and Development has also noted that "the whole notion of security as traditionally understood must be expanded to include the growing impacts of environmental stress. There are no military solutions to environmental insecurity."<sup>15</sup>

In this paper it is in the economic, political, and social dimensions that the concept of security is applied in the context of Bangladesh. As Bangladesh faces more severe threats from internal rather than external front the paper naturally places more emphasis on analyzing the internal threats. However, due consideration would also be given to the external front.

## II. GEOPOLITICAL ENVIRONMENT OF BANGLADESH

A state's security maneuverability is heavily dependent upon its geopolitical environment. Geopolitical setting may either help augment national capabilities or increase the vulnerabilities of a state vis-a-vis its adversaries. Therefore, any study on the national security of Bangladesh would remain incomplete unless

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14. Lester R. Brown, *Human Needs and the Security of Nations* (Headline Series 238, February 1978), p. 6.
  15. Quoted in M. G. Kabir, "Politics, Security and Development in the Third World : The Interlinkages", in M. Abdul Hafiz and Mizanur Rahman Khan (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 37.



the geopolitical environment in which she operates is focused clearly.

Geopolitically Bangladesh belongs to the South Asian region which consists of less than 2% of the world land mass but provides living space for one-fifth of the total humanity of the world. Geostrategically it is important on a number of counts.<sup>16</sup> **First**, the region is the littoral area of the Indian Ocean which, following the withdrawal of the British from the East of Suez in 1968, has been the theatre of superpower conflicts. The frantic competition for control of the sea lanes of the Indian Ocean led to incessant military build-ups in and around the area and it had its repercussions on the South Asian region. Although, the ongoing *detente* between the two super powers has contributed to an unprecedented state of peace in East-West relations none of the two superpowers has militarily dismantled from the volatile Indian Ocean region. **Second**, the region geographically borders on the sphere of influence of one of the super powers and maintains close geographic proximity to another great power - China. **Third**, the region is contiguous to a geostrategically important and potentially unstable area of the Persian Gulf where 60% of the World's oil reserve is located. It is also an important part of the Asia-Pacific region which is emerging as the 'new theatre' of world politics. **Finally**, the region connects West Asia on the West and South-East Asia on the East and then completes the 'geographic bridge' between the two regions.

Bangladesh, with a territory of 53,598 square miles, constitutes the Eastern most part of this geo-strategically important South Asian region. But she is almost entirely bounded by India on three sides - North, East and West with a common border of 2566 miles. In the South-East near Chittagong and Cox's Bazar she has

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16. See BIISS, "Major Aspects of Foreign Policy of Bangladesh" Paper presented at a Seminar at the Institute of Foreign Affairs and National Security (IFANS), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Seoul, 6-9 April 1983, p. 6.

a little boundary with Burma with a common border of 176 miles. In the South she is surrounded by the Bay of Bengal with a coastal boundary of 257 miles.

Bangladesh's geographical location is such that she has practically only one neighbour - India. She would, in fact, stand virtually isolated if on any issue her access to the Bay of Bengal is cordoned off by the powerful Indian navy with no parallel in the region. Such predicament is generally termed as 'tyranny of geography' that has made Bangladesh geographically dependent on India in a number of ways. **First**, Bangladesh is a deltaic flat alluvial terrain that shares no less than 54 rivers with India many of which originate in the Himalayan ranges in the north and east but flow through Bangladesh. These include the three major river systems - the Ganga, the Brahmaputra, and the Meghna that have hundreds of shifting channels of varying width and depth. Bangladesh gets almost 92% of her waters flowing through these rivers. The key to the control of the rivers, however, lies with India, the upper riparian state. This puts Bangladesh at the mercy of India without whose positive and active support and cooperation Bangladesh is unable to exploit her water resources for much needed developmental efforts and to check natural vagaries like devastating floods and debilitating drought. **Second**, because of her India-locked location Bangladesh has no option but to depend on India at least for land communication with the outside world. This situation is potentially alarming as she may be put into dangers in time of a crisis relations with India. It may also harm external trade and commerce conducted through land routes.

Despite her geographical handicaps vis-a-vis India, Bangladesh seems to possess some geo-strategic importance in her South Asian setting. Before her emergence in 1971 the sub-continental balance was locked between India and Pakistan. The major feature of the balance was that both India and Pakistan had to woo the super and great powers as intrusive force to the

balance. While Pakistan was having friendly relations with China and the United States, India opted for developing close relations with the Soviet Union. The emergence of Bangladesh clearly shifted the balance in favour of India making her almost the arbiter of South Asian affairs. Yet, Bangladesh has emerged as an independent actor in the scene having her own set of relations with regional and extra-regional powers. In the context of South Asian setting her geostrategic importance can be understood in the following manner.

**First**, Bangladesh commands access to the Indian Ocean through the lanes of the Bay of Bengal. It increases her foreign policy bargaining capacity vis-a-vis the outside World. **Second**, Bangladesh borders on the seven North-East Indian States, known as the north-East Frontier Agency (NEFA), which are witnessing insurgency and revolt for a long period. Despite repeated attempts India has failed to bring peace and stability in the NEFA. By virtue of her location Bangladesh divides the NEFA from the rest of India and thus, has the potential either to ignite or cool down the turmoil in this part of the Indian union. India, therefore, needs a friendly country that would not be a *cordon sanitaire* for NEFA insurgents. This was, infact, one of the primary motivations behind Indian support for the creation of Bangladesh in 1971.<sup>17</sup> **Third**, Bangladesh's role in the South Asian sub-system also adds to her geopolitical importance. Almost all the smaller nations of South Asia are at odds in their bilateral relations with India and they are thus juxtaposed to their bigger neighbour. Any external powers hostile to India have the possibility to have a confident friend in Bangladesh.

Bangladesh's location, however, seems to render the least geostrategic importance to the extra-regional powers, especially

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17. For elaboration see, Shaukat Hassan, "The India Factor in the Foreign Policy of Bangladesh" in M. G. Kabir and Shaukat Hassan (eds.) *Issues and Challenges Facing Bangladesh Foreign Policy* (Bangladesh Society of International Studies, Dhaka, 1989), pp. 52-53.

the two superpowers. As India, and also Pakistan, remain at the heart of South Asia's geostrategic scene, none of the superpowers was ever keen to develop special ties with this country in their global competition for courting clients. Former U.S. President Jimmy Carter, during his presidential visit to India, publicly acknowledged that South Asia lies within the Indian ambit of power, a disclaimer which the rest of the countries except Pakistan can hardly disregard.<sup>18</sup> The lack of superpowers strategic interests in Bangladesh increases its 'vulnerability to the strategic requirements of India that seeks the exclusion of outside powers' involvement in South Asia.

China, however, remains the lone extra-regional power to whom Bangladesh has some strategic significance but that too fluctuates with changes in super and great power relations. Chinese strategy in South Asia after the 1962 Sino-Indian war has always aimed at countering Indian dominance - political, military and economic. The South Asian countries suffering setbacks with India were easily courted by China and vice versa. It may be said that after 1975 Bangladesh developed a workable relationship with China based on the philosophy of 'Oppose India' which ultimately led to the development of an informal Peking-Dhaka-Islamabad axis. At least for military reasons this axis may remain operative until such time as Bangladesh and also Pakistan serve a role in China's South Asia policy. In case of a military conflict between China and India, an unfriendly Bangladesh may cause major injuries to India's security. Although the possibility of another Sino-Indian military clash seems to be at the minimum level China would perhaps still court Bangladesh to remain friendly to her to face future uncertainties in South Asia.

Two specific factors, however, simultaneously minimises the geostrategic significance of Bangladesh both within and outside

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18. *Ibid.*, pp. 51-52.

the region. The **first** factor is India's overwhelming geographic, military and economic position in South Asia. In terms of area India is the world's seventh largest country with a combined space of nearly two-thirds of the size of Europe barring the Soviet Union. She occupies more than 76% of the territory of South Asia and her coastline extends up to 3500 miles. She lies in a strategically vital location of the Indian ocean flanking the straits of Malacca in the East and the Persian Gulf in the West. Militarily, India is a major actor not only in South Asia but in the world as a whole. It maintains the World's fourth largest standing army in terms of men in uniform, sixth largest navy and eighth largest air force.<sup>19</sup> India's progress in the economic field is also overwhelming. It is one of the ten largest industrial powers and the fourth largest manufacturer of the World. In all these fields all South Asian States combined, let alone Bangladesh, fall far behind India. **Second**, the changing patterns of relations among the super and great powers go in India's favour viewed from South Asian context. The ongoing peaceful relations between the two superpowers have triggered off the easing of tensions between the Soviet Union and China and by implications between China and India. A friendly India is definitively of more strategic value to China than any other India's neighbours. This is equally true in case of India also. As a result, both countries are now seen keen to develop cooperative relationship by discarding their previous acrimonious pattern of behaviour.<sup>20</sup> This is a signal to the South Asian smaller actors that the China card could not be used against India at random as in the past.

Under such prevailing realities what geostrategic significance an India-locked Bangladesh can have both in and outside the region? As it is apparent, except her 'nuisance value' to India

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19. Iftekharuzzaman, "The India Doctrine : Relevance for Bangladesh" in M. G. Kabir and Shaukat Hassan (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 19.

20. For details see, Nilufar Choudhury, *Sino-Indian Quest for Rapprochement : Implications for South Asia* (BISS Papers, No. 9, Dhaka, 1990).

Bangladesh is strategically almost a non-influential actor both in regional and extra-regional politics. This is a situation that directly undermines the national security of Bangladesh.

Even from the viewpoint of building an effective military defence system Bangladesh suffers a number of serious geographical setbacks. **First**, the nature of topography is clearly an indication of military weakness. Bangladesh has no natural barriers like mountains or big body of waters separating her from the outside powers. She is, therefore, easily vulnerable to any blistering foreign attack. This is a significant factor that undermines the national security of a country like Bangladesh but strengthens the same of countries like the United States or the United Kingdom which are well protected by the sea lanes of the Atlantic. **Second**, Bangladesh lacks territorial depth and hence she is incapable of pursuing an effective geo-military strategy for protracted warfare. Territorial depth is a prerequisite to achieve victory in modern military warfare. Despite initial defeat, it enabled the Soviet Union to crush Nazi forces during the Second World War. But Bangladesh's territorial limit actually discourages her to opt for national security through military means although her national layout with hundreds of rivers provide a good defence net-work. Therefore, geographical realities are more of a curse than a blessing for the preservation of the national security of Bangladesh.

### III. SOURCES OF THREATS TO BANGLADESH

Like any other Third World state Bangladesh faces wide ranging threats of serious magnitude to her security. These threats can be discussed under two sub-heads : internal and external. In most cases, however, the internal and external sources of threats have their specific ramifications with inter-categorical trend and overlappings.

## The Internal Threat Scenario

Bangladesh faces threats from within her boundary from two main sources : socio-economic and political. Each of these types of threats is analysed here separately.

### *Socio-Economic Threats*

Threats emanating from the domestic socio-economic realm are perhaps most significant for Bangladesh. Bangladesh is one of the least developed countries of the world with a per capita GNP of only 180 US dollars. The economy is basically agrarian that still absorbs 55.27% of the total work force of the country and contributes 44% of its total GDP.<sup>21</sup> The industrial sector is still in a nascent condition, it shares only 14% of the total GDP of the country which is the lowest in South Asia. The country's economy is so much dependent on the agricultural sector that any fluctuations in agricultural output, particularly of rice and jute - the two main crops - easily tend to destabilize the total economy.

Of particular concern is the fact that the economy is passing through a stagnant situation. During the period from 1965-89 the per capita GNP has increased at a rate of only 0.4%. Agriculture has registered a 2.1% annual growth rate in the period 1980-89 and industry a 5.0% growth rate in the same period.<sup>22</sup> This annual growth rate is very much insignificant to cope with the economic problems arising out of both internal front and the external world.

This poor economy is burdened with a large population of 110.7 millions (mid-1989 estimate) crammed into an area which is slightly larger than the State of New York, USA. According to World Development Report 1991, the current average growth

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21. (1989 estimate) See, *Asia Yearbook 1991* and *World Development Report 1991*.

22. *World Development Report 1991*.

rate of population is 2.6% and by the year 2000 the growth rate is expected to slow down to 2.1%. If the growth rate cannot be checked effectively the total population of Bangladesh will be 139 millions at the turn of the century and by 2025 it will be nearly 200 millions. The existing over-population resting on a stagnant economy has already posed severe economic threats to the existence of Bangladesh in the form of draconian poverty, rising unemployment, increasing dependence on external aid and so on.

Bangladesh is already caught in a perpetual poverty trap. Since independence up to the present time the poverty situation in this country has been in a state of progressive deterioration. The picture is more gloomy in the rural areas where 90 per cent of the population reside. According to a government official report prepared for the meeting of Aid-to-Bangladesh Consortium in Paris in April 1990, more than 50 per cent (according to a group of economists in Dhaka this is more than 60 per cent) of the people in the rural areas live below the poverty level.<sup>23</sup> In all cities and towns of the country there is also a sizable number of slum dwellers and destitutes.

The poor are divided as 'moderately poor' and 'ultra poor'. Acute malnourishment (e.g. per day calorie intake of less than 1600 Cal.) is considered to be an indicator of ultra poor. According to one estimate more than 30% of the population of Bangladesh are ultra poor.<sup>24</sup> The per capita daily calorie intake of the population in 1988 was 1925 calorie and infant mortality rate (per 1000 live births) was 106 in 1989. In the rural areas many people do not have any belongings. There is also a significant

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23. Ishtiaq Hossain, "Management of National Security Problems of Bangladesh" in *Strategic Analysis*, Nov. 1990, p. 951.

24. See Atiur Rahman, "Missing Dimensions of Poverty : The issues of Vulnerability and Insecurity" in M. Abdul Hafiz and Mizanur Rahman Khan (eds.), *Development, Politics and Security : Third World Context*, *op. cit.*, p. 97.



number of landless peasants. They are just rootless having no security of tomorrow.

This poverty stricken people cannot be expected to contribute to the security of Bangladesh. They are just indifferent to the state structure and do not care for the sovereignty of the country. They rather drag the country backward and increasingly make it unfit to compete with the external world.

Another source of severe threat to Bangladesh is the spectre of unemployment in the country. According to available statistics approximately 30% of the total civilian labour force of the country are unemployed. The repeated government order in the past few years to stop recruitment for government services has seemingly increased the number of unemployed significantly. Moreover, the job situation in the country has been always dissatisfactory.

According to the Planning Commission estimate about 2.3 million new jobs were created in the first three years of the Third Five Year Plan, compared to the target of 5.1 million.<sup>25</sup> The government's employment programmes through successive Five Year Plans has never been fulfilled. In the First Plan (1973-78), for example, against a target of new employment generation of 3.4 million, only 3 million new jobs were created. During the Two Year Interim Plan (1978-79), only 60% of the target 1.8 million new jobs were created. The Second Plan (1980-85) probably had the best results, generating 3.2 million new jobs compared with a target of 3.5 million. The job generation records of the past hardly inspire any one to be optimistic about the Planning Commission's new job target for the Fourth Plan seriously.

The rising unemployment in the country is putting extra pressure on the economy. At present, the economy does not have

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25. See, *Asia Yearbook*, 1990, p. 85.

the capacity to absorb the the unemployed work forces. It creates frustration in the unemployed persons that in turn leads to widespread social and political violence. It thus shakes the very foundation of the society making personal and collective social security a matter of imagination only.

A major weakness of our national economy is its high dependence on external aid and assistance. To be sure, all the Five Year Plans of the country have been formulated on the assumption of the availability of foreign loans and grants. The Annual Development plan (ADP) of Bangladesh is totally dependent on foreign aid. For example, in 1988-89 the aid dependence for the implementation of the ADP of the country was a staggering 91 per cent.<sup>26</sup> The ADP dependence is likely to rise high also this year because of the economic losses Bangladesh has incurred from the Gulf war.

In this world of interdependence aid is considered very much essential for development. But aid dependence often minimizes the sovereign decision making power of the receiver thereby creating undue threats to the security of the country in question. If security in the external sense means the preservation of independent decision making authority on issues of national interests then Bangladesh has been forced to compromise it much earlier. In the case of Bangladesh, the World Bank backed up by the IMF, has been the praetorian guard for Western aid donor influence.<sup>27</sup> These two institutions have used their leverage through their domination of the aid consortium to impose their policy prescriptions including privatization of the economy and reduction of subsidies on publicly supplied agricultural inputs and foodgrains.

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26. *Dhaka Courier* (March 30-April 5, 1990), p. 13.

27. For a beautiful study, see, Rehman Sobhan, *The Crisis of External Dependence : A Study in the Political Economy of Foreign Aid to Bangladesh*, (UPL, Dhaka, 1983).

*Political threats*

Threats arising out of the domestic political realm are equally alarming. In terms of the political climate Bangladesh has been perhaps one of the most unstable countries in the world. Although the people inhabiting the present day Bangladesh have a chequered political history of thwarting foreign subjugation and exploitation and a fierce sense of nationalism they have apparently failed to bring political stability in their independent motherland. Since independence, the country has been rocked by political violences of severe form including a series of coups and counter-coups. Within a short time-span of only four years the country's founding president Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was brutally assassinated. The military strongman, and later president, Ziaur Rahman lost his life in the same way in early 1981. Thereafter, the country fell into the iron fist of another military dictator, H. M. Ershad, ousted through people's upsurge on December 6, 1990. All these have effectively barred the development of a congenial political atmosphere making political stability a far cry for Bangladesh.

The matrix of political instabilities that has hitherto been endemic in Bangladesh's domestic politics includes a long list. There are ceaseless dissensions on core national issues, such as national identity, development strategy, role of religion in national life, national security and foreign relations etc.<sup>28</sup> The different political parties and politicians are still undecided on these issues. Of late there has emerged a national consensus regarding the form of government. It's a happy sign that the Jatiya Sangsad on August 6, 1991 has unanimously adopted the 12th Constitutional Amendment Bill that favours switch-over to parliamentary system of government by replacing the existing presidential

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28. For details see, Mahbubur Rahman and Abdur Rob Khan, *Bangladesh : Towards National Consensus* (in Bengali), BISS Papers No. 12, June 1990, pp. 10-40.

system introduced by the 4th constitutional Amendment Bill adopted in 1974.

Scholars, however, find a number of reasons behind the vortex of political instabilities in Bangladesh. Of these two main reasons are stated here. The first factor that immensely contributes to political instability is the frustrating state of economic underdevelopment of the country. The key point is the linkage between political decision making for economic management. This is because politics and development are inseparable and mutually complementary. Economic and Political decision making, therefore, overlap and indeed policies for economic management are essentially part of those for state management.<sup>29</sup> The ruling elites' economic decisions basically aim at allocating limited resources between various alternative purposes. Difficulties, however, arise when the ruling elites favour one section of the society over the other in allocation of resources. This, in effect, creates a persistent pressure to divert resources from those with little or no political power to those who are in possession of the same. Resources are thus distributed away from villages to the cities toward the advantaged as distinct from the disadvantaged, and more towards sectors that help regime survival. It ultimately opens up the pandora's box of political instability and turmoil. The past twenty years history of Bangladesh clerly support it. This factor is, infact, attributed most to the chronic political instability in Bangladesh.

**Second**, the undeveloped state of political institutions can be held equally responsible for chronic political instabilities in Bangladesh.<sup>30</sup> After independence in 1971, Bangladesh has been unable to develop well-organized, strictly disciplined political

29. See Iftekharuzzaman, "Political Instability, External Vulnerability, Under developmet : The Vicious Circle for Bangladesh" in M. Abdul Hafiz and Mizanur Rahman Khan (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 60.

30. This chapter heavily draws from Iftekharuzzaman, *op. cit.*, pp. 62-63.

parties having contacts at the grassroots levels. Most of the political parties in this country are mainly Dhaka-based, and they lack well formulated national political programme to bring people within their folds. Moreover, party politics is characterised by intense factionalism infighting, and unnecessary polarization. This is a fact both in the government and in the opposition. In both cases, the leadership caters to the maximization of the interests of the most influential subgroups and power bases at the cost of the interest of the masses. Hence, politics is determined largely by narrow individual or group interests. Political postures, activities and performances are determined by factors of personalities, influences, patronage and prestige rather than by specific political issues or alternate political programmes. The end result is that the character of the state elite and sub-elites of the country is too weak to create a national consensus capable of creating a strong, legitimate and viable state authority.

### Integrational Crisis

The matrix of political instability is however, an outcome of the failure of nation building process in Bangladesh, Nation building is indeed a difficult task for almost all countries but for Bangladesh it is rather an artificial problem as she in terms of ethnic, linguistic and cultural homogeneity commands the second top position in the World after the two Koreas. Almost 98 per cent of the population is made up of the Bengalis.<sup>31</sup> Yet the country is undergoing a deep integrational crisis that today poses the greatest challenge to the integrity and security of Bangladesh.

Bangladesh has a small number of tribal peoples who may be described as 'national minorities'. The minorities mainly inhabit

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31. Syed Anwar Hussain, "Ethnicity and Security of Small States : South Asian Context" in M. Abdul Hafiz and Abdur Rob Khan (eds.), *Security of Small States* (BISS, Dhaka, 1987), p. 45.

the hilly outlying areas of the country.<sup>32</sup> The Sautals numbering about 50,000 live in the North-Western districts of Dinajpur and Rajshahi. The Khasias, Garos, Khajongs or Khogangs (each of which number about 40,000) and a few thousand Dalus inhabit in the north eastern region of Mymensingh and Sylhet. The south-eastern region of the country, known as Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) is inhabited by 13 minority ethnic races that include the Chakmas, Marmas, the Tipperas, the Morangs and others. The Chakmas alone constitute nearly 47,89% of the total tribal population in the CHT which covers 10% of the total area of Bangladesh.

The tribal insurgency problem began to air immediately after independence with the demand of the Chakmas for a special status of the CHT. In 1973 the Bangladesh Jatiya Sangsad passed a resolution with a great majority of votes declaring Bangladesh a unilingual and unicultural nation state.<sup>33</sup> Earlier the government of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman abolished CHT Regulation of 1900, introduced by the British for administrative control of the tribal peoples, and extended the existing legal system of the land to the Hill Tracts Districts. Manabendra Narayan Lama, an MP elect to the National Parliament, demanded that the tribal status of his area be restored. As an MP Lama fought in the Parliament to preserve the tribals' separate identity and to attain their lost rights, arguing that :<sup>34</sup> "You can not impose your national identity on others. I am a Chakma, not a Bengali. I am a citizen of Bangladesh-Bangla-

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32. For a geographic distribution of the minorities, see Ishtiaq Hossain, *op. cit.*, p. 951.

33. Syed Nazmul Islam, "The Chittagong Hill Tracts in Bangladesh : Integrational Crisis between Centre and Periphery" in *Asian Survey*, Vol. XXI, No. 12, December 1981, p. 1219.

34. Quoted in Syed Aziz-Al Ahsan and Bhumitra Chakma, "Problems of National Integration in Bangladesh : The Chittagong Hill Tracts", in *Asian Survey*, Vol. XXIX, No. 10, October 1989, p. 968.

deshi. You are also Bangladeshi but your national identity is Bengali. They (tribals) can never be Bengali."

The Bangladesh Constitution of 1972 made no provision for a special status of the CHT which it enjoyed under the British Regulation of 1900. The Chakmas, however, stepped up efforts to secure a constitutional guarantee to maintain their distinct tribal identity. A group of tribal leaders under the leadership of Manabendra Narayan Lama met Prime Minister Sheikh Mujibur Rahman on January 15, 1972 and set forth four basic demands of the tribal peoples.<sup>35</sup> These demands were : (1) autonomy for the Chittagong Hill Tracts, including its own legislature, (2) retention of the 1900 Regulation in the constitution of Bangladesh; (3) continuation of the tribal chiefs' offices; and (4) a constitutional provision restricting the amendment of regulation 1900 and imposing a ban on the influx of the non-tribal people to the tribal areas. Sheikh Mujib rejected all these demands outright and advised them to do away with their ethnic identities.

It is evident that the preservation of ethnic identity remains at the heart of Chakma insurgency. They do not really demand a separate political entity but rather an autonomous status. Their grievances centre in threat to their cultural entity, de-tribalization and changing the demographic and ethnic balance through Bengali settlement and insufficient economic development.<sup>36</sup> Having failed to get their demands fulfilled the Chakmas organised a movement against the Dhaka government. They first formed a regional political party called the *Parbattya Chattagram Jana Sanghati Samity* or JSS (United Peoples Party of Chittagong Hill Tracts), and next they formed a military front named the *Santi Bahini* who are presently fighting the Bangladesh security forces in the area. But given the underdeveloped state of the

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35. *Ibid.*, p. 967.

36. Syed Anwar Husain, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

economy Bangladesh can hardly afford to fight a prolonged war at home.

The Chakma insurgency, although an outcome of domestic political factors, has however, acquired an external dimension putting Bangladesh's security at the highest point of risk. The Chinese and the Indian governments have on occasion lent support to the tribal rebels.<sup>37</sup> This is an outright intervention in the internal affairs of a neighbouring state. Such favour from a powerful neighbour does in fact, have the possibility to bifurcate any state like Bangladesh.

The failure of the Bangladesh government to reach an amicable settlement of the Chakma issue can be attributed to a number of causes : (1) lack of political farsightedness on the part of political leadership to grasp the impact of the issue; (2) a new tendency of the Bangladeshis to establish the concept of 'internal colonialism' in their motherland. The Bangladeshis had fought against Pakistani colonialism but soon after independence they did not hesitate to practise the same over the national minorities; (3) the absence of a responsible democratic government in the country has complicated the problem to a great extent.

### External Threat Front

A state's external threats generally emanates from its immediate geographic vicinity. In case of Bangladesh it obviously refers to India that encircles it from three sides-north, east, and west. Apart from geographic location, Bangladesh's perception of India has already turned the latter into a threat of serious nature. Indeed, India-bashing in Bangladesh politics goes very high both

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37. Talukder Maniruzzaman "The Future of Bangladesh" in A. Jayaratnam Wilson and Dennis Dalton (eds.), *The States of South Asia : Problems of National Integration* (Vikas Publishing House, New Delhi, 1982), p. 270.



in government circles and opposition political parties.<sup>38</sup> The extreme left or Islamic fundamentalist political parties like Marxist *Sorbohara Party* or *Jamaat-e-Islami* generally take a strong anti-India public stance and usually subscribe to the view that India is bent upon dominating Bangladesh both politically and economically. However political parties like the Awami League or the Bangladesh Communist Party stand for good economic and political ties with India.

The central questions that arise here are that despite India's invaluable assistance to Bangladesh in her war of independence in 1971, why is India perceived *en masse* a threat to the security of Bangladesh ?

A number of factors can be identified behind Bangladesh's perception of India as a threat. Some of these factors are directly related to fundamental principles of Indian foreign policy and others are creation of specific situations in Indo-Bangla relations.<sup>39</sup>

First, since her independence in 1947 there has been persistent moralistic overtures in India's foreign policy. These moralistic, principles, such as anticolonialism and neocolonialism, the sovereign equality of all nation-states, peaceful coexistence rather than balance of power politics, etc., are generally proclaimed as providing the basis for India's foreign policy. But New Delhi's actual practices have been opposite evident in policies adopted towards its neighbours in the sub-continent. With regard to its immediate and vital interests, India has generally been

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38. Ishtiaq Hossain, *op. cit.*, p. 949.

39. Leo E. Rose, "India and Its Neighbours : Regional Foreign and Security Policies" in Lawrence Ziring (ed.) *The Subcontinent in World Politics : India, Its Neighbours and the Great Powers* (Prager Publishers, New York, 1982) pp. 37-41. and Partha S. Ghosh, *Cooperation and conflict in South Asia* (UPL, Dhaka, 1989), pp. 64-66.

hard-line and uncompromising in projecting its influence and power in the sub-continent. The only exception to this general rule was the 1977-79 period when the Janata government was in office and pursued a policy of good neighbourliness toward the smaller neighbours. This encouraging trend was, however, discarded under the successor Lok Dal (1979) and Mrs. Gandhi's Congress governments that accused the Janata government of 'selling out' India's interests to its neighbours.

India's prime objective in the Sub-continent revolves round the acceptance of its paramount position in South Asia's economic, political and security systems from both the major external powers and the other states in the region. The mechanism through which India prefers to attain this objective is its insistence on bilateral relations with the neighbours that would eventually tie them into the Indian economic and security systems in a cooperative but inevitably subordinate relationship. Such a policy is definitively alarming to the neighbours who aspire to chalk out their course independent of India.

The **second** factor that has contributed to the creation of an India bogey in Bangladesh is the tendency on India's part to intervene in the domestic affairs of its neighbours. Professedly, India's broader policy in South Asia has been the maintenance of a stable regional political system, or at least, the preservation of the *status quo*. But there is very rarely any consistency in this policy. Covert Indian intervention in Nepal in 1950-51 and again in 1961-62, her overt intervention in the 1971 Bangladesh crisis and her recent free interference in Sri Lanka and the Maldives are some of the instances in which New Delhi's actions were disruptive of the *status quo* and intentionally so. Indeed India's intervention records have created anti-Indian feelings and threat perceptions not only in Bangladesh but all other South Asian countries also.

In Bangladesh's case, however, certain other factors may be stated here that sowed the seeds of Indian threat in this land. These factors squarely relate to the pre- and immediate post-liberation period. Scholars point out that the seeds of anti-India feelings were contained in the different ideological streams that led the struggle for independence of Bangladesh. The ideological streams were divided into three main groups - secularist, the orthodox and the leftist. The secularist stood for Bengali language and the cultural heritage of the Bangladeshis irrespective of their religion. On the other hand, the orthodox emphasized Islamic ideology and the leftist emphasis was neither on language nor religion but on Marxist ideology. Among these three streams the secularist played the most significant role in the liberation struggle and they formed the new government in Dhaka. Because of their very controversial role in the liberation war the orthodox remained isolated from political activities. The leftists on the other hand, failed to garner public support for power. Therefore, they naturally projected India as a threat to Bangladesh in their bid to capture power. But after 1975 either of these two groups directly or indirectly has been in state power and the India threat perceptions have been reactivated many times which is still alive in people's feelings.

Of particular concern to the neighbours has been India's specific security outlook and doctrine in South Asia. India takes it for granted that her own security amounts to South Asia's security and that however the neighbours may view it the maintenance of South Asia's security is her own responsibility. This security outlook is a British legacy inherited by India after her independence in 1947. K. M. Panikkar, the noted Indian historian and diplomat, has written that "an integrated conception of the defence of India, and a doctrine of Indian defence supported by a consistent foreign policy (were) among the two major contri-

butions of Britain to the Indian people".<sup>40</sup> The British security doctrine basically rested on three fundamental premises<sup>41</sup> :

(a) safeguarding of the north-west frontier of India, through which successive invading armies had made inroads into Indian territory;

(b) preventing the area around the Indian subcontinent from falling under the control of a foreign power, and

(c) Command of the Indian Ocean and its environs.

Some particular threat perceptions led to the evolving of British India's strategic doctrine. The Czarist or Soviet Russia and the French were identified as potential threats. To meet the threats to India's security the British evolved the concept of 'extended frontier'. The basic idea behind the concept was that threats to India's security were to be met as far away from India's borders as possible. Based on this logic the British extended their north western security frontier up to the Iran-Afghanistan line. The conclusion of a series of treaties with the Himalayan states of Nepal, Bhutan and Sikkim (annexed by India in 1975) made the security concerns of these states the exclusive business of British India. To meet the threats coming through the waters of the Indian Ocean, Malaya, Java and Penang were taken over; Singapore was developed as a military base and Burma and Sri Lanka were annexed. Later, the Cape of Good Hope and Mauritius were brought under British control. All these contributed to making the Indian Ocean an area of absolute safety.

Independent India's approach towards the small nations of South Asia was very much influenced by the British security

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40. Shelton Kodikara, *Strategic Factors in Interstate Relations in South Asia*, Conberra Papers on Strategy and defence, No. 19, 1919, p. 13.

41. *Ibid.*

doctrine. Accepting the basic premise of the doctrine India identified its security needs in the same pattern of extended frontier methods. It means that India will take interests in the security needs of her small neighbours.

The Indian security planners and decision makers have identified two ways to safeguard India's security interests. **First**, constant care would be taken that the neighbours do not become open to outside intervention. **Second**, interests would be focused on the internal stability of the nations concerned because any upheaval in the South Asian political system that goes to weaken the system would be an invitation for outside intervention. It would constitute a threat to India.

India has thus tried to maintain an order in South Asia that will exclude extra-regional intervention but if the neighbours require they would ask for Indian help to tackle their internal situation and if any of the neighbours invite any foreign powers without giving any prior notice to India and simultaneously asking for Indian help that will be considered inimical. The modern version of this concept has come to be known as the *India Doctrine* or *Indira Doctrine* and so on.<sup>42</sup>

India's perpetual enmity with Pakistan has been the greatest obstacle to the effective operation of this security doctrine. The establishment of Bangladesh in 1971, however, opened up a unique opportunity for India to try the doctrine in South Asia. The management of Bangladesh's security soon became India's responsibility. Soon after the independence of Bangladesh K. Subrahmanyam, India's leading defence analyst, made two important observations that reflected India's perception of Bangladesh at the time, Bangladesh had no external security concerns, and its

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42. For an elaboration see Iftekharuzzaman, "The India Doctrine : Relevance for Bangladesh" in Kabir and Hassan (eds.) *op. cit.*,

only concern would be internal security.<sup>43</sup> Subrahmanyam further claimed that Bangladesh was fortunate because "a threat to Bangladesh will be considered a threat to India, treaty or no treaty" and that the "main responsibility for ensuring the security of the countries on the shores of the Bay of Bengal from the external maritime intervention will be India's."<sup>44</sup>

The Indo-Bangladesh friendship treaty of March 1972, is considered the most effective instrument to materialize India's security doctrine in South Asia. The treaty through various provisions effected security relationship between the two countries with regional implications.

At this stage it is pertinent to dispel some misperceptions prevailing in some political quarters in Bangladesh that India is bent upon conquering Bangladesh and thus make it the 25th state of the Indian Union. First, it should be taken into consideration that Bangladesh will be not an asset but a liability to India. With her vast population, insurmountable economic difficulties such as poverty, unemployment and a huge foreign debt Bangladesh is already facing challenges that are enough disincentive for an Indian takeover. India is also extremely burdened with similar problems. Therefore, the possibility of Indian invasion and annexation of Bangladesh sounds unwise.

**Second**, the fact should be remembered that physical invasion in this century has become an obsolete and counter productive phenomenon. It is more difficult to rule a country than conquer it. Iraq's invasion of Kuwait and the subsequent humiliation is the most positive disincentive to any territorial conquests in future.

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43. Shaukat Hassan, "The India Factor in the Foreign Policy of Bangladesh" *op. cit.*, p. 49.

44. Quoted in *Ibid.*

**Third**, it can be logically argued that the fierce sense of nationalism of the Bangladeshis is enough to discourage foreign invaders. The Bangladeshis, who are otherwise a peace loving nation, have always fought and defeated foreign aggressors. The struggle against the Pakistani colonialism is but a recent example.

**Fourth**, the Indian perception of Bangladesh also makes the point clear that Bangladesh merits little attention to India. One Indian scholar puts it : "The India factor has significance for Bangladesh politics but there is no corresponding Bangladesh factor in Indian Politics".<sup>45</sup>

India's security doctrine in South Asia, is however, a major cause of concern for Bangladesh and other South Asian states. From the perspective of India's size, population, strategic location, the past creativity of its people and its abundant resource endowment such a doctrine is not anything unexpected. All the great and superpowers do behave in the same way as India expects to do in South Asia. The prevailing perception of the Indians regarding their motherland's great power status is that India can not but follow the footsteps of the great powers of the world. K. Subrahmanyam asserts :

This country with its population, size, resources and industrial output will be a dominant country in the region just as the US, Soviet Union and China happen to be in their respective areas. This is just a fact of geography economics and technology.<sup>46</sup>

India's neighbours should keep their eyes open to the fact that great power syndrome is persistent throughout the world. They should rather learn to live with India not irritating her too much. The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC)

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45. Partha S. Ghosh, *op. cit.*, p. 57.

46. K. Subrahmanyam, *Indian Security Perspective* (New Delhi 1982), p. 214.

may gradually emerge as an effective mechanism to gradually effect process of good neighbourly dealings between India and her neighbours.

We new turn to the economic threats, if any, stemming from India to Bangladesh. India's economic motives and position seem to pose the actual threat to the security of Bangladesh. The threats were more manifest in the immediate post-liberation period. Bangladesh's post-1975 economic relations with India have, however, minimized the threat considerably.

India's motives behind militarily assisting Bangladesh in its war of independence in 1971 was the expectation that the former's independence would bring an economic windfall to India.<sup>47</sup> New expectations arose as after 1965 war all trade between the then East Pakistan and the neighbouring Indian states were banned. Pran Chopra, an eminent Indian political commentator and former editor of the *Statesman* summed up the Indian view thus :

The people of East Bengal have long desired closer economic cooperation with India. . . .with such cooperation India and East Bengal can find much better answers to the grave economic and political problems of the area than either can by itself.<sup>48</sup>

In the post liberation period Bangladesh's immediate need was to restore trade relations with India. But the Indian planners began to look at Bangladesh mostly in mercantile and economic terms. They saw Bangladesh as a vast market for Indian goods. Therefore, they did not consider that trade relations with Bangladesh would have to be on an equal footing, that is, there would be no going back to the pattern of trade that existed in pre-partition days when East Bengal served as the hinterland of

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47. This section is mainly based on Shaukat Hassan, *India-Bangladesh Political Relations, op. cit.*, pp. 139-144.

48. Quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 140.



Calcutta where all manufacturing were concentrated. It created a deep sense of fear among the new elites of Bangladesh. The Pakistani mercantile and business class so far hindered the growth of an independent entrepreneurial business class in Bangladesh. Independence brought the new entrepreneurial elites opportunities to flourish freely but they soon found encircled by the Indian bourgeoisie who were given ample access to the new country's economy. It genuinely created a sense of Indian economic threat to Bangladesh.

Bangladesh signed a trade agreement with India on 28 March 1972. The agreement envisaged two types of trade : a border trade between the two countries whereby permits would be issued to people living up to sixteen kilometers on either side of the border to dispose of their goods on a day-to-day basis; and a balanced rupee trade worth Rs. 250 million (US \$ 35m) each way.<sup>49</sup> The border trade was kept free of customs and currency regulations.

The trade agreement, especially the border trade section, soon produced negative effects on the people of Bangladesh. The export of essential items like fish, eggs, rice and poultry etc., and cash crops like jute caused great hardship particularly to the poorer sections of the society. India was blamed for the scarcity of goods and the resulting price rise. Widespread smuggling from Bangladesh to India was identified as one of the main reasons behind this situation. It was the main cause of the disruption of the country's nascent economy. An England based independent study of the problem came to the conclusion that food prices were soaring in Bangladesh chiefly because supplies sent in from abroad to relieve widespread hunger were being smuggled out to the Indian market by Bangladesh traders aided by corrupt government officials.<sup>50</sup> Although the border trade arrangement

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49. See *Ibid.*, p. 143.

50. Quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 146.

has been cancelled much earlier, according to reports, the persistent smuggling still threatens the economy of Bangladesh.

In terms of economic development and strength, India's overall position in South Asia seems to constitute a threat to all the South Asian countries including Bangladesh. This also provides the reasons as to why regional economic cooperation is not gaining much momentum as designed through SAARC. Within South Asia India accounts for roughly 76% of the population, 73% of the total area, 68% of manufacturing exports, 62% of export earnings, 79% of manufacturing value added, 59% of the import market and 41% of external reserves.<sup>51</sup> Especially India's GDP and her population are more than three times than of all other SAARC countries put together. The smaller South Asian neighbours, and Bangladesh in particular, fear possible Indian domination over their economies. The fear is strengthened by the fact that India has a huge export surplus with all her South Asian trade partners. This perhaps explains why Pakistan imports iron ore from Africa, and Sri Lanka imports apples from Australia, and not from India.<sup>52</sup>

#### IV. STRATEGIES FOR SECURITY MAINTENANCE

Security is perceptual, it is how we perceive it. Strategy on the other hand, is the mechanism to overcome our perception of insecurity. It is the way to fight and minimize the insecurities. The perception of security and insecurity however, still seems to be at the preliminary stage in Bangladesh. So far no conscious efforts to devise an effective strategy to preserve our national security has

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51. Iftekhazzaman, "South Asian Trade Cooperation within SAARC and with ASEAN : Rationale, Prospect, Realities" in *BIISS Journal* Vol. 10, No. 1, 1989, p. 8.

52. R. L. Varshney, "Promotion of Trade and Economic Relations : Obstacles and possibilities" in Arif A. Waqif (ed.), *South Asian Cooperation in Industry, Energy, and Technology* (SAGE Publications, New Delhi, 1987), p. 101.

been made. The long absence of a democratic environment in this country may be identified as a major cause behind it. In the absence of democracy, regime security has frequently prevailed over national security. The present state of development and its consequential negative impact on the society is a pointer to it.

Of late, there are signs that people have started thinking of national security both at government and non-government circles. Reference can be made here to the National Security Council (NSC) formed in 1982 under the direction of former President Justice Abdus Sattar.<sup>53</sup> The Council consisted of nine members including the three chiefs of armed services with the President of the Republic as its chairman. The primary function of the Council was to advise and assist the government on all matters relating to national security as a whole. At the non-government level, the academic community seems to take interests in national security thinking. This community emphasizes security through development and deemphasises the role of the armed forces in politics. Their thoughts are however, still inarticulate and they have no strong platform on this issue. Thus, at the domestic front we are standing far away from devising, or contributing to devising, a security maintenance strategy. Even in the realm of security studies we are lagging far behind.

At the external front, we have however, guided some conscious efforts to strengthen and preserve our security and survival. The strategy pursued in our relations to the external world may best be termed 'multilateralism'. This strategy is an inevitable outcome of the post 1975 developments in Bangladesh. The serious setbacks that developed in Indo-Bangladesh relations after mid-1975 led to the development of this strategy. The ruling elites in Dhaka in the

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53. *The Bangladesh Observer*, January 2, 1982.

post-'75 period sensed only one source of eternal threat - India. Therefore, the chief political objective of the strategy of multilateralism has been to put an effective counterforce to the India threat. Economically, this strategy has aimed at securing more foreign aid and assistance to help build the national economy.

Bangladesh perceived that her security can best be guaranteed against external odds through an active and increased participation in different multilateral organizations like the UN system, the Non-aligned movement and so on. She therefore, stepped up various efforts to get actually involved in these organizations. Since then her diplomacy (management and execution of foreign policy) began to make up the deficiencies in military capability and the guiding star of her diplomacy became defence, not offence. What was the objective of such diplomacy? Evidently, there were two objectives: first, to avoid and neutralize conflicts with the external aggressor (s) and second, to resist the aggressor (s) through the timely support of the international community if the conflict actually develops into a war. Bangladesh's growing role in the world bodies make the strength of these arguments clear.

### **Bangladesh and the Non-aligned Movement**

Bangladesh obtained the membership of the Non-Aligned Movement at its Algiers summit in 1973. She found herself in total harmony with the moral and ideological principles of the Non-aligned movement, for it rejected bloc politics, political dominance and advocated for a new world order. Late President Sheikh Mujibur Rahman joined the Algiers summit at a time when the economy was weak, the infrastructure broke down, and there was general dislocation throughout the country that called for immediate efforts at rehabilitation and reconstruction - a task

that required international assistance on a large scale. At the summit Mujib spoke against racialism, colonialism and imperialism in tune with the Indo-Soviet axis. Since at that time the country was apparently free of any external threats, no external threat perception did dominate Mujib's speech at the summit.

At the fifth Non-aligned summit held in Colombo in 1976 Bangladesh took a completely different position. By that time there was qualitative deterioration in Indo-Bangladesh relations as evidenced by flare ups along the borders. There was fundamental changes in the country's foreign and domestic policies. President Sayem's speech at the Colombo summit reflected the basic insecurities faced by the new government. About one-third of his speech dealt with real or perceived threat to Bangladesh's security, and the indirect reference to India was obvious.<sup>54</sup> In view of India's overwhelming size vis-a-vis Bangladesh, the non-aligned members were reminded that "the purpose of non-alignment was that of protecting the weak from the strong. . . . with the emergence of a great number of newly liberated countries, the thrust of non-alignment today must be seen in the context of unequal relations among states and the threat to their political and economic sovereignty."<sup>55</sup> Since then Bangladesh has more or less reiterated the same concern at all the non-aligned summits.

### **Bangladesh and the UN system**

Faith in the principles of UN Charter constitutes the most important cornerstone of the foreign policy of Bangladesh. Bangladesh got membership of the world body on 17 September 1974. During the past few years our government leaders made use of every opportunity to project our views on global and other

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54. Shaikat Hassan "Bangladesh's Non-aligned Posture" in *The Non-aligned World*, May, 1983, p. 400.

issues in different fora of the UN. This has contributed to her strong standing among the comity of nations. She was elected a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council for a period of two years (1979-81). Bangladesh also presided over the 42nd annual meeting of the UN General Assembly. This is a recognition to her constructive role in the UN over the past years.

In fact, by standing firmly for the principles of the UN Charter Bangladesh has greatly enhanced its moral strength against external odds. There may be continuous debates about the effectiveness of the UN, but it is still the best forum for the enhancement of small states sense of security. Bangladesh provides an excellent example of it. By failing to hammer out an effective and acceptable solution of the Ganges water dispute, Bangladesh in 1976 internationalized the issue at the UN General Assembly session. The success of this move remains debatable, but at the least the UN forum could be used for drawing international attention to a problem that was vital to the security of Bangladesh.

Besides her active and positive political role, Bangladesh has also played a significant economic role in different world bodies. She strongly advocated the urgency of restructuring the world economic order immediately after the adoption of Declaration on the NIEO by the Sixth Special Session of the UN in 1974. This urgency was felt by her own precarious economic condition as she belongs to the group of 42 least developed countries. As the Chairman of the Group of 77 she played an active role in promoting understanding between the North and the South. Bangladesh also stood for closer cooperation between the developing countries under the framework of the Caracas Programme of Action (CPA). Guided by her own compulsions he opted to have closer relations with the developed western countries. The basic objective behind all these efforts has been to ensure her economic survival.

Now one may raise the question whether the 'Strategy of multilateralism' can be an effective counterforce to threats perceived to emanate from immediate surroundings. The record of New Delhi's dealings with Dhaka is an obvious reference to the fact that India is quite uncomfortable with the general trend of developments in Bangladesh's domestic and foreign policies. Bangladesh's geographic predicament and a vast range of other weaknesses vis-a-vis India is a fact. Therefore, Bangladesh's external linkages with China, the US, and the Middle East, however effective these may be, can not be used as a counterforce to India. Despite it, Dhaka's intensive efforts to expand strong ties with the external powers have considerably neutralized the undue influence of her giant neighbour. This is what the strategy of multilateralism has achieved for Bangladesh over the past years.

#### V. MEASURES TO STRENGTHEN BANGLADESH'S SECURITY

As our analysis suggests, Bangladesh, like many other countries, faces threats both from her internal and external sources. But unlike external threats, the internal threats are most serious and most fundamental in nature. Indeed, they pose insurmountable challenges to the very survival of Bangladesh. At the same time the external threats can by no means be deemphasized. Measures are, therefore, urgently needed to overcome or to put an effective check to her multiple sources of insecurities. The following measures may turn out effective to strengthen the security of Bangladesh.

**First**, an elaborate and comprehensive internal security strategy should be immediately formulated covering socio-economic and political aspects of the country and urgent measures should be taken to execute the strategy without delay. In the economic realm, the strategy will aim at accelerating a process of harmonious development through maximum utilization of the limited resources Bangladesh has at its disposal. The growing

social inequalities between rich and poor should be reduced through the adoption of effective laws and regulations. Politically, the strategy would launch all-out efforts to build consensus on core national issues thereby facilitating the restoration of political stability in the country. To make easy the process of nation-building concerted efforts are to be guided to solve the integrational crisis suffered by the country in the dominant tribal areas.

**Second**, there should be a clear understanding and appreciation regarding the future of armed forces in Bangladesh. The prevailing mood in the country seems to be that Bangladesh needs to deemphasize the role of military in guaranteeing her security which can be ensured more effectively through development. The increasing size of her military budget at the cost of socio-economic development and its precarious military capabilities, actual or potential, vis-a-vis external powers seem to be the factors contributing to the above contention. But the fact should be remembered that a little bear cannot live with a giant wolf in a totally insecure condition. On the other hand, Bangladesh can hypothetically have the option to dismantle her military establishments if she could be declared a neutralized country like Switzerland through the positive consent of the international community. But that sounds unrealistic in view of the fact that Bangladesh is not situated in a geopolitically significant area surrounded by hostile rival powers. She is rather encircled by India. This requires the bear to put itself on alert. We, however, argue that since Bangladesh does not have the required resources to maintain a large, even a medium army she should rather opt for a small but highly skilled army. In other words, there would be no quantitative expansion but qualitative development of our armed forces. The chief objective of such an army in any eventuality would be to consume such time in deterring the aggressor as would be enough to mobilize international opinion through parallel with diplomatic moves.



**Third**, a policy of accommodation should be pursued in Bangladesh's bilateral dealings with India. Bangladesh's relations with India must be viewed and appreciated in realistic terms. It is a fact that India is the dominant factor in Bangladesh's foreign policy and not vice versa. Therefore, Bangladesh has to take into account a number of factors while formulating the course of her bilateral ties with India. First, India offered invaluable assistance to Bangladesh's war of independence in 1971. Second, India is the largest neighbour flanking Bangladesh on three sides; Third, and most importantly, Bangladesh has a number of outstanding issues with India some of which are of vital importance to her economy and survival. These issues are such that their solution require an atmosphere of cordial relations between the two countries. Any policy of confrontation on the part of Bangladesh would only result in an accelerated pace of hostilities and mutual mistrust thereby rendering an acceptable solution of the outstanding bilateral issues more difficult. A policy of accommodation may bring a number of gains for Bangladesh. Politically, it would put Bangladesh more or less on a tension free track. It would be a positive achievement towards the fundamental objective of the foreign policy of Bangladesh : friendship to all, malice to none.

However, detractors may argue that a policy of accommodation with India would make Bangladesh subservient to that country. Such argument seems to be unfounded in view of the fact that if Bangladesh's relations with Pakistan, the US or China are not considered subservient then why that with India ? The policy of accommodation with India must be based on mutual respect for each other's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

**Fourth**, the current strategy of multilateralism should be pursued by all means in Bangladesh's external dealings. This strategy would act as an insurance to all other leavages in her national security pursuits.